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ABSTRACT

This publication is the first of several planned reports for the Literacy in Libraries across America (LILAA) initiative, a four-year study that will explore the efforts of five leading public library-based literacy programs to improve learner persistence through a variety of programmatic, operational, and support service strategies. The five libraries participating in the study are: New York Public Library; Greensboro Public Library (North Carolina); Redwood City Public Library (California); Queens Borough Public Library (New York); and Oakland Public Library (California). An overview of the current status of library literacy programs is presented, and the following program strategies that the libraries employ to increase adult learner persistence are summarized: child care; transportation; new curriculum; expanded hours of operation; teacher and tutor training; new instructional approaches; new intake process and student orientation. Programs in each of the participating libraries are then described. (MES)

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So I Made Up My Mind

Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

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DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

MDRC

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

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So I Made Up My Mind:
Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

John T. Comings
Sondra Cuban

August 2000

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The Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is supported by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and, with the support also of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, is being evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL).

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Reaching Adult Learners Through Libraries

At the start of a century rich in promise, as many as 40 million adult Americans live in the shadows of prosperity, denied the pleasures and rewards of lifelong learning because of weak literacy skills. Since 1996, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds have invested nearly $10 million to develop library-based literacy programs nationwide and thereby to improve the quality of programs and services for adult learners and their families. The Funds have supported a variety of program improvement strategies, including curriculum development, the introduction of small-group and computer-based instruction, and learner assessment.

We have been especially interested in helping programs address more effectively the challenge of "learner persistence" in literacy instruction — finding ways to keep adult learners in programs long enough to make a lasting, substantial difference in their skills.

In 1999, the Funds launched the evaluation of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative, which is being jointly conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). The four-year study will explore the efforts of five leading public library-based literacy programs to improve learner persistence through a variety of programmatic, operational, and support service strategies. This publication is the first of several planned reports that will document the work of these programs and yield findings that we believe will be valuable to the adult literacy field.

Public libraries are important providers of literacy programs and services. In many ways, they are in a unique position to address the need for improved learner persistence. As community-based centers of lifelong learning, libraries offer a wealth of resources to people of all ages and backgrounds. They have flexible hours, offer a safe place for children, and have other supports to help adult learners overcome barriers to staying in literacy programs. Libraries also collaborate frequently with other literacy providers, making them a potentially powerful vehicle for disseminating promising practices.

This report is the first product of an evaluation effort that we hope will prompt better practices in the field and better outcomes for learners. It provides important insight into the issue of learner persistence, and it offers details on the Funds' library-based literacy initiative and the five library-based programs participating in the persistence study. We are grateful for the leadership of those programs and for the outstanding work of the two research organizations that are lending their expertise to this endeavor. We hope this will whet your appetite for more information on how we can work together on this continuing challenge facing the literacy field.

M. Christine DeVita
President
Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds

Studying a Library-Based Literacy Initiative

The evaluation of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative, which is introduced in this overview, is an important new research project for MDRC. It continues our work in adult literacy — a research area of growing significance. As jobs and other aspects of everyday life come to require ever more advanced skills, literacy is becoming increasingly critical for successful functioning in society. MDRC's past studies of adult education and literacy programs have found evidence that greater literacy brings greater work opportunities, but have also revealed that many adult learners fail to participate long enough to benefit substantially from adult education. This is one reason why more research on learner persistence — the primary focus of this research project — is necessary.

From recent studies of adult education provided to welfare recipients, we know that learners' consistent participation and commitment to program goals are key to program success. This is as true for education programs as it is for efforts to provide job training or welfare-to-work services. Our participation in the LILAA initiative creates opportunities to identify new and promising strategies for fostering persistence in library literacy and other programs.

MDRC carries out its research in real-world settings where we can study ongoing programs, the operations and experiences of which have broad relevance. Public libraries are a prime example of such a real-world setting, one that we have not worked in before and are eager to learn more about.

At MDRC, we collaborate closely with program providers, funders, and academic researchers. Such partnerships expand the scope of our research and create mutual learning opportunities that can greatly enrich a new research effort like the persistence study. We look forward to collaborating with and learning from our colleagues at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds, and the participating libraries. We hope that, after reading about this initiative, you will want to follow our four-year study of strategies to increase learner persistence.

Judith M. Gueron
President
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

So I Made Up My Mind:
Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

I know education is the way out. It is the way out of poverty. That is what is keeping me from getting out of poverty. No education. So I made up my mind. I said, OK. Second Start. It has done a lot for me.

Sometimes you get upset. You think, why me? I am not supposed to be at Second Start. That is how I feel. My thoughts tell me I am not supposed to be here. But when it comes out on paper, I know this is the place for me. I told someone, "If I can only get what I think inside my head out on this paper." You feel trapped. You wonder, "When am I ever going to stop coming here?"

I have been coming here for two years. Two years. I am able to write essays now, but still it is not good enough. I want to be able to write a book. I want to be able to take a regular college course, without being afraid.

So it is not good enough. People tell me I am too hard on myself. And maybe that is why I do not go farther. Wanting so much from myself. And fear. It is hard to deal with. But I know you have to keep trying if you want something. I know that. I think that is my main problem. Wanting to give up. Getting angry with the whole process. Learning is such a long process. You really have to have patience. It is a long process. You have to keep trying. I know that.

Resonja Willoughby, a student in the Second Start library literacy program in Oakland, California, wrote these words. They appear in *Education Is the Way Out*, a volume in her library's Oakland Readers Series.[1] Resonja is one of thousands of adults who are improving their reading, writing, and math skills; learning to speak English; or preparing to take the General Educational Development (GED) test in library literacy programs around the country. Like Resonja, these people want to improve their skills so that they can have better lives, but they face many barriers that make it difficult to persist in their studies long enough to achieve their goals. Although some adults come to library literacy programs with goals that can be met in a short period of time, most have goals that require hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of instruction and practice.

The Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is helping libraries around the country improve their literacy programs and address the issue of adult learner persistence. As part of the initiative, a study is being conducted in five public libraries to explore ways in which literacy programs can support persistence. A collaboration between libraries and researchers, the LILAA persistence study is designed to yield:

- a clearer definition of persistence
- better tools for measuring persistence
- a deeper understanding of the supports for and barriers to persistence
- a description of programmatic approaches that foster persistence

Library literacy programs are part of a national system of adult education that is supported by federal, state, local, and private funds. Many other entities in this system, such as community colleges and school districts, serve more adults and have larger budgets. Libraries, however, bring their own strengths to this system; they are permanent institutions in local communities that have many resources to support adult learning — for instance, accessible facilities, extensive collections of books, and a large group of potential tutors, including retirees and casual library users. Moreover, unlike other programs and education providers, libraries do not generally receive funding that depends on how quickly they move students into employment or into more advanced programs. Consequently, libraries are more accessible to students with very low initial literacy levels or special learning needs. Many of these students have no other education providers to whom to turn for help in increasing their literacy.

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1. Resonja Bell (now Resonja Willoughby), "Education Is the Way Out." In S. Hare (Ed.), *Oakland Readers: Fourth Series* (p. 25). Oakland, California: Second Start Adult Literacy Program, Oakland Public Library, 1996. Used by permission.

The LILAA persistence study will explore the unique role that libraries play in the national system of adult education and will study the efforts of five library literacy programs to increase learner persistence. The five libraries participating in the study are:

1. New York Public Library in New York City
2. Greensboro Public Library in North Carolina
3. Redwood City Public Library in California
4. Queens Borough Public Library in New York City
5. Oakland Public Library in California

The researchers carrying out the study are on the staff of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), which has offices in New York and San Francisco, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), which is based at Harvard University. The research is funded by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The adults who participate in these library literacy programs make up a small part of the national population of adults who could benefit from literacy program services. The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey found that almost 40 million adults in the United States have low literacy skills, defined as not being able to find two pieces of information in a sports article or to calculate the cost of a purchase from an order form.[2] The Department of Education estimates that six million adults do not speak English.[3] In addition, there are millions of American adults whose literacy skills are not considered low, but whose skills are insufficient for success in college or skills training programs. Millions more do not have a high school diploma. Most of these people could benefit from additional education in basic literacy and math skills.

There are many reasons why an adult in this country might have low literacy skills or lack a high school diploma. Some people in this situation are recent immigrants who could not read or write English before they arrived. Although many immigrants received good educations in their own countries, many others lack strong literacy skills in their own languages. Other adults with low literacy skills grew up in the United States and

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2. I. Kirsch, A. Jungeblut, L. Jenkins, and A. Kolstad. *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. 1993.

3. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). *Digest of Education Statistics* (NCES 98-015). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education. 1997.

speak English, but attended schools in poor communities that did not provide them with a real opportunity to learn. Still others had learning disabilities that were not properly addressed. Finally, some adults had childhoods that were too difficult to allow time and attention for school, while others were not motivated to learn or dropped out of school for personal reasons. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American adults are more likely to have attended inadequate schools and to have faced other barriers to learning when they grew up, which explains why these ethnic minorities are overrepresented among adults with low literacy skills.

The beneficial effects of literacy and educational attainment on economic well-being are well documented. Labor economists and education researchers have shown that literacy skills and education credentials increase people's earnings, long-term success in the labor market, and family income.[4] The importance of literacy and education in the labor market has only increased as jobs have become more complex and as even relatively low-wage positions have come to require substantial literacy skills. Some researchers attribute the growing earnings inequality in the U.S. labor market during the past two decades to these developments.[5]

The consequences of low literacy skills or of a lack of a high school diploma go beyond limited work opportunities. Literacy is increasingly important in other areas of people's lives, such as their roles as parents, citizens, and students. To adapt in our ever-changing society, we all need to be "lifelong learners," but adults who lack literacy skills cannot take advantage of learning opportunities available to others. Many colleges and vocational schools are not prepared to serve students with low literacy skills. Library-based literacy programs can help bridge the gap between adult students' limited skills and their long-term educational, personal, and professional goals.

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4. See, for example, J. Mincer. *Schooling, Experience, and Earnings.* New York: Columbia University Press. 1974. S. Polachek and W. S. Siebert. *The Economics of Earnings.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. 1993. A. Sum, R. Taggart, and N. Fogg. *Dreams to Dust: The Deteriorating Labor Market Fortunes of Young Adult Men and Women in the United States, 1967–1994.* Boston: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University. 1995.

5. See F. Levy and R. J. Murnane. "U.S. Earnings Levels and Earnings Inequality: A Review of Recent Trends and Proposed Explanations." *Journal of Economic Literature,* 30 (3): 1333–81. 1992. G. Burtless. "Rising Wage Inequality and the Future of Work in America." In J. Norwood (Ed.), *Widening Earnings Inequality: Why and Why Now* (pp.7–40). Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

The Current Status of Library Literacy Programs

In the nineteenth century, a national system of public libraries and public schools grew out of a commitment to provide free educational resources to both children and adults. The books housed in libraries were considered educational tools that could supplement the efforts of the schools and help adults achieve their vocational and lifelong learning goals. The role of libraries in supporting literacy and adult education became explicit in the early part of the twentieth century, when libraries were enlisted in efforts to provide Americanization programs for new immigrants. By the 1930s, libraries were widely perceived as the "people's university," providing an opportunity for adults to continue their education after leaving school.

As part of the War on Poverty in the 1960s, greater federal funding was made available for library literacy programs. As libraries began to look for ways to attract patrons who were less well educated and less advantaged socioeconomically, literacy services became an integral part of their outreach effort. Library literacy programs and services have grown steadily over the past 30 years. A nationally representative survey conducted in 1999 by the Library Research Center at the University of Illinois found that 90 percent of the 1,067 libraries in the survey provided literacy services in one or more of three forms:[6]

1. developing collections that support existing literacy programs and actively promote the services of those programs
2. partnering with existing literacy programs by providing space and referring patrons to program services
3. providing literacy programs either in their own buildings or nearby

Over 80 percent of all libraries in the survey provided the first type of support; 80 percent provided space, and 90 percent provided referrals; and 30 percent provided their own literacy services. Thus, lessons learned from the LILAA initiative and persistence study are of potentially broad value.

As the LILAA persistence study begins, the field of adult literacy is undergoing great change. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 lays out a new structure for

6. L. Estabrook and E. Lakner. *Literacy Programs for Adults in Public Libraries*. Urbana-Champaign, Illinois: The Library Research Center, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, 1999.

federal support of adult literacy programs. Although WIA is focused on helping the unemployed and the working poor increase their success in the labor market and raise their incomes, it also aims to improve other outcomes, such as children's performance in school and adults' participation in voting. WIA demands much greater accountability of programs that accept federal funds, in terms of both academic achievement and impact on participants' lives. WIA's accountability system, the National Reporting System (NRS), favors standardized measures of academic achievement and indicators of impact on employment. High rates of learner persistence are essential for adult education programs to show the kinds of improvement captured by the NRS. But many adults drop out of literacy programs before they can be tested for learning gains. Consequently, data on achievement gains and improvements in other outcomes will not be available for many participants in adult literacy programs — which can undermine the usefulness of the NRS for policymakers.

The LILAA Persistence Study

The five libraries taking part in the LILAA persistence study were selected because they operate high-quality literacy programs that serve a sizable number of adult students. Since 1996, with support from the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds, these libraries have made concerted efforts to improve their services, particularly in the area of technology. In August 1999, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds renewed its support for the LILAA initiative until 2002 to enable these libraries (1) to implement strategies to improve adult learner persistence and (2) to participate in this study.

Program Strategies

Although the strategies that each library will employ to increase adult learner persistence are still being refined, they will include:

- ***Child care.*** Many adult students have children who need care while their parents attend classes or meet with tutors. Securing such care is often difficult and expensive, and when child care arrangements fall through, adult students may stop participating. Therefore, providing child care is a potentially important way for library literacy programs to support persistence.

- ***Transportation.*** Some adult students do not have private means of transportation, and in some locations public transportation is inconvenient or expensive. Especially for low-income students, transportation problems can become a barrier to participation, which library literacy programs can lift either by providing participants with transportation or by giving them free or low-cost public transportation tickets.

- ***New curriculum.*** Much of the existing curriculum for basic literacy classes was originally developed for children. As a result, it often focuses on issues that are not relevant to adult students' everyday lives. A new literacy curriculum that is more relevant to adults can make their learning easier and more interesting, which in turn might increase their learning motivation and persistence.

- ***Expanded hours of operation.*** Currently, many library literacy programs operate during limited hours (often regular office hours only), making participation difficult for adult students who work. Extended hours enable students to remain active in the program if they become employed, if their job hours shift or increase, or if their schedule changes for other reasons.

- ***Teacher and tutor training.*** Improved training for teachers and tutors can help them provide better instruction and support to their students. When students are receiving good instruction and are making progress, they may be more likely to persist in learning.

- ***New instructional approaches.*** Many students in adult literacy programs experienced failure in the public school system and bring that experience with them to these programs. New and different instructional approaches that make learning feel less like school and more like an adult activity among peers can help students get past these negative experiences. Such approaches include group learning, computer-assisted learning, and project-based learning.

- ***New intake process and student orientation.*** Many students who drop out of literacy programs do so in the first few weeks. Students may drop out because the program was not appropriate for them in the first place, or because it failed to orient them and make them feel welcome. Both of these problems can be addressed by more comprehensive intake procedures and a more structured orientation to the program. During intake and orientation, program staff can better identify barriers to persistence and seek ways to overcome these barriers through program strategies.

Studying Persistence

The LILAA persistence study will help the participating library literacy programs learn from their experiences and will share those experiences with the field of adult literacy. The study seeks to describe the strategies that the programs develop to foster persistence, the ways in which the programs change as a result of implementing these strategies, and the ways in which students' persistence changes.

The first step in the study concerns the concept of persistence itself. Together with program administrators, the research team is developing a comprehensive definition of persistence and a data collection system to track persistence over time. This system will allow program administrators to monitor the persistence of individual students in their programs and to understand the barriers and supports that affect whether students persist. The research team will measure persistence in different cohorts of students over time to assess whether the new strategies help students persist in the programs and improve their literacy.

As they collect these quantitative data, research team members will be interviewing adult students and program staff, observing program services, and studying the communities served by the libraries. This qualitative research will produce in-depth descriptions of library literacy programs as they operate today, introducing these programs and their students to the larger adult education establishment. This research will also describe in detail how programs choose what persistence strategies to pursue, how they implement these strategies, and how they overcome difficulties in planning and implementation. All of this information may benefit other library literacy programs and other programs serving adult learners.

In their work with library literacy program staff and students, the researchers will experiment with using the Internet as a research tool by holding guided discussions (similar to focus groups) for staff and for students on the Internet. This approach will be used to describe the project's activities, explore themes related to the important issue of persistence (thus helping to define it), and identify program strategies that increase persistence.

Out of this collaborative effort will come three project reports. The first, available in late 2000, will provide a detailed characterization of the study and its research design, the programs and strategies being employed to increase persistence, and the issues

that emerge as libraries begin implementation. In late 2001, an interim report will describe the first full year of implementation and present early analyses of the quantitative data on persistence over time. In early 2003, a final report will present analyses of all the qualitative and quantitative data collected. It will estimate the cost of implementing persistence-enhancing strategies in library literacy programs and present analyses of the link between persistence and literacy. This final report is also intended to advise program designers and policymakers concerning how to increase adult learner persistence.

The overall study is being managed by MDRC, which is also responsible for its quantitative aspects, while NCSALL is responsible for the study's qualitative aspects. The reports that result will reflect an ongoing collaboration among the two research groups, the program staff, and the students.

The Five Library Literacy Programs

New York Public Library

The New York Public Library (NYPL) is known worldwide for its extensive collection, which serves scholars in every academic discipline. Since the nineteenth century, the Sewark Park branch on the Lower East Side and the Aguilar branch in Spanish Harlem have been two of the most important institutions in the country for helping immigrants assimilate into life in the United States. Today, immigrants still come to the NYPL for English instruction, preparation for citizenship tests, and reading materials in their own languages. Its neighborhood libraries have collections in many languages and are filled with immigrants from all over the world.

The NYPL is home to Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs) at eight of its 85 branches. The CRWs are found in three of New York's five boroughs: Staten Island has one, Manhattan has four, and the Bronx has three. The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), which is sponsored by the Mayor's Office of Adult Literacy, is the primary funding agency for these services, and NYCALI specifically funds libraries to serve adults with the lowest levels of reading skill. Support from private funders has allowed the CRWs to add technology and improve curricula. Most CRWs specialize in small-group instruction led by volunteer tutors. Four full-time administrative staff support this effort.

which serves over 1,000 adults each year. Most of the adults who seek out services are African-American, Afro-Caribbean, or Latino, and the staff reflect the ethnicity of the students. The LILAA persistence study will focus its research efforts on three CRWs:

1. The **Fordham** branch is in a densely populated, thriving business district of the Bronx and houses its CRW in several rooms at the back of the library. The CRW expands into other areas of the library in the evenings, when small-group instruction is offered. The program serves 180 students. In one room, 12 computers are arranged so that students can work alone or with staff assistance on educational software programs or the Internet. This arrangement also creates a lively environment where students can share information as they work at their computers.

2. The **Wakefield** branch, which has one of the oldest CRWs, is located in an urban residential neighborhood in the Bronx and serves mostly Afro-Caribbean adults. The CRW's two professional staff and 16 volunteers serve 100 adults, who attend twice a week at various hours. Located in a basement room, the CRW resembles a school auditorium. The staff are Afro-Caribbean and use materials and curricula that reflect students' cultures and their interests in such daily matters as employment, taxation, and health.

3. The **Seward Park** branch is located in Manhattan, on the Lower East Side, near Chinatown. To reach the program, students climb two steep stairways and pass the children's area to a bright room filled with plants. At the entrance to the CRW is a column labeled "Milestones" that displays students' accomplishments. Lining this large, sunny space is a well-read multicultural book collection. The program serves 80 students, who gather in small groups around tables.

Among the strongest aspects of the NYPL program are its adult literacy collection and its willingness to capture student voices in writings that the program publishes. Many of these writings focus on the role of learning in students' families and cultures. Two examples[7] follow:

I feel good coming back to school to learn how to read English. Before, I didn't go to school. When I was a child, I went fishing instead of going to school. Every time I had an excuse for the teacher. My

7. From "Authors' Corner," a journal consisting of original pieces by the students, tutors, and staff of the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing at the Seward Park Branch Library. June 1999.

father hit me every day because I didn't go to school. Now I feel I need to read. I can do everything with my hands. I've been a mechanic and handyman. But I can't read. I want to read the Bible.

My great-grandparents hired a tutor at home to teach children. But my grandmother's older sister, who had a good education, divorced her husband whom her parents forced her to marry. After that, my great-grandparents thought girls with an education wouldn't listen to their parents and husband. Therefore my grandmother lost her chance for an education, but she tried very hard to learn by herself. Sometimes she hid outside of her brothers' classroom to listen.

Each year, students participate in the citywide All Write program, at which professional actors read students' writings in public as part of a student recognition ceremony.

Greensboro Public Library

The Greensboro Public Library is the fourth-largest library system in North Carolina. Ten years ago, the library led a community effort to address the needs of adults who have low literacy. This initiative grew into the Community of Readers, which has since developed a plan called Literacy 2000. An 18-month study of literacy in Guilford County, where Greensboro is located, built the foundation for Literacy 2000. The plan is supported by the library, Reading Connections (a nonprofit agency that houses one-on-one volunteer tutoring and a hotline), Guilford Technical Community College (the largest provider of adult education services in the county), and most community agencies in the county. Americorps volunteers are a key part of the staff for these services. The Greensboro Public Library supports adult education at two of its nine branches: Chavis and Glenwood.

1. The **Chavis** branch calls itself the Lifelong Learning branch because it works with all segments of the population, from children to adults. It offers an extensive adult literacy collection and computer lab. Its literacy program is supported through the Greensboro Public Library's operating budget and private funding. Every week, afternoon and evening GED and adult literacy classes are taught by two teachers from the local community

college. The computer lab provides adults and children with instruction on and access to word-processing software and e-mail. The library partners with a welfare-to-work program to foster literacy through community leadership and empowerment for 18 to 24 participants in 12-week sessions that include work. This program supports leadership development by focusing on critical thinking, confidence-building, and community activism.

2. The **Glenwood** branch is in a working-class neighborhood that has attracted many refugees and immigrants from all over the world. The library is housed in a modern, sunny building that is a source of pride to the community. It offers small-group English language instruction, family literacy classes, a computer lab, and a collection of multicultural reading materials. On a typical day, students are involved in various activities throughout the library. One student is reading a newspaper with her tutor in the adult literacy and multicultural materials room and then moves on to work with Rosetta Stone, a computerized learning program, in the computer lab. Another woman, whose breathing is assisted by a machine, is tutoring a student who is a Mexican physician studying for her certification exam. Reading Connections tutors and their students are reviewing materials prepared by Literacy Volunteers of America. A family literacy program funded by the local Junior League is operating in the children's room. An immigrant student is delivering a book report about her country and culture to local schoolchildren. At the same time, two Asian women and an African man are learning basic English.

The strengths of the Greensboro Public Library's literacy program are many. Its whole-community approach fosters collaboration and leads to positive relations among staff and students in a personalized environment. Many of the classes use a less formal approach to teaching that complements the more traditional instruction offered by Reading Connections and Guilford Technical Community College. The program's multicultural emphasis supports the participation of the growing immigrant population.

Redwood City Public Library

Project READ is housed in the Redwood City Public Library, which was once a fire station. The program's geographical area is home to more than 15,000 adults who do not have a high school diploma or a GED, as well as to the affluent, well-educated employees of high-tech companies around Redwood City. Project READ serves approximately 200

adults, two-thirds of whom are Hispanic, and emphasizes a curriculum and instruction that are student centered. More than 180 volunteer tutors teach in the program, and many of them work in the computer industry. Their one-on-one tutoring fills a gap left by the school district and community college programs, which offer traditional classroom instruction.

Project READ is integrated into the Redwood City Public Library's overall services and receives financial support through the library's general fund. The California State Library provides matching funds for resources contributed by individuals, businesses, and foundations. Project READ has 11 computers (with 40 software programs) available on the second floor of the library. Small-group instruction helps students learn how to use the computer programs; after students are trained, they can work on the computers alone or with their tutors.

At four local schools, the library supports the Kids in Partnership Program, which helps at-risk teens and children improve their reading, writing, and English skills. The teens tutor the children, which helps improve the skills of both. In the evening, small groups of parents are tutored while their children play learning games and receive homework help. This intergenerational approach helps build self-esteem and provides children with positive models of reading. A nonprofit group, Redwood City Friends of Literacy, raises funds that provide the students and their parents with eye exams, reading glasses, hearing tests, learning assessments, clothes, and food. The library also delivers adult literacy services in a local prison.

The strengths of Project READ include its holistic approach, which treats students as active participants in the process of instruction. The staff, students, and tutors communicate regularly about instruction and how to improve it, discussing what works and what does not. This process has yielded an innovative training program for tutors on how to teach adults with learning disabilities. At Project READ, students, tutors, and staff work together to plan the future direction of the program and to develop the services it provides to the community.

Queens Borough Library

The Queens Borough Library is one of the nation's oldest and largest library systems and serves one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the country. Immigrants from over 100 countries — who speak over 50 languages — use the system, which comprises

the central library and 62 branches. Six branches house adult learning centers (ALCs), which are funded through the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), other government programs, and foundations. Each of the six ALCs is led by a manager who has a professional background in adult literacy. The program serves approximately 1,500 adult students by offering English language and literacy services. Twenty full-time professional staff and approximately 150 volunteer tutors provide small-group instruction.

Three of the Queens Borough Library's six branches are part of the LILAA persistence study:

1. The **Flushing** branch, the library's busiest, is located in a commercial district densely populated by immigrants from all over the world. The ALC is located near the entrance, on the lower level, and houses its literacy program within glass-enclosed rooms, including a computer lab staffed by paid, well-trained instructors; a library and tutorial collection; and a large room for instruction. This program serves approximately 470 adults.

2. The **Central** branch serves about 300 adult students in bustling Jamaica, Queens, in a storefront across from the main library. This small, carpeted center has one room in the back for conversation classes, and its computer lab offers Internet access. Shelves are filled with self-study materials. Small-group instruction takes place around tables spread throughout the ALC.

3. The **Rochdale Village** branch houses a smaller program that serves about 100 students in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. This ALC occupies a small area inside the library and provides literacy tutoring for adults who speak English.

Each of the Queens Borough Library's six ALCs provides computer classes and supports self-study through audio- and videotapes. All the centers have literacy collections that can be checked out by adult students. The library recently published a new series of guides, the Queens Kaleidoscope Series, each of which focuses on a specific theme, such as using library resources more effectively. The library also publishes *Student Talk*, a newsletter developed by students and staff; *Tutor Talk*, a newsletter in which tutors can express their concerns to an education specialist who provides advice; and *The Open Door*, a journal of student writing. The ALCs make every effort to be open and accessible for as many hours each day as possible, and they have recently focused on improving their English language instruction.

Oakland Public Library

Second Start is part of the Oakland Public Library. Almost 50 percent of Oakland's population is African-American, as are 85 percent of Second Start's students. The program frequently offers African-American thematic literary events, such as local writer Ishmael Reed reading his work. Students also go to plays in the community and discuss them afterward. The program's large multicultural collection is filled with books that reflect African-American culture and the community surrounding Second Start.

Founded in 1984, Oakland's Second Start program has a multiethnic staff. Almost 150 tutors work with more than 300 students on and off site. Many of the program's students are not served by other adult education services in the area because they have far lower literacy skills than those programs are prepared to handle. At Second Start, students receive intensive and personalized attention.

The majority of Second Start's funding comes from the City of Oakland, with additional support from private sources. Second Start offers family literacy activities, one-on-one tutoring, small-group instruction in spelling and math, and pre-GED classes. A large computer center forms the centerpiece of Second Start. In this room, students read through the Oakland Readers Series, help one another with their writing, check out the Internet, practice typing, and use educational software. One student who had visited her pen pal in Kenya posted an account of her experiences in a hallway where students' thoughts can be displayed on banners.

Second Start promotes reading for pleasure and does not have a rigid educational agenda or philosophy. Its focus on the empowerment of students is reflected in students' published writings. Widespread recognition has greeted the program's latest publication, *Women of Oakland: A Book of Life Stories Told by Women in the Second Start Adult Literacy Program*, which contains interviews conducted by an adult literacy student. An electronic version of this book is currently available on the many computers at Second Start.

Second Start provides an energetic environment. Its informal meeting room is a place to share food donated by neighborhood restaurants, and smaller rooms are available for tutoring and for classes in art, yoga, and stress management. Spelling classes are popular. Second Start is fun, encouraging, and responsive, and it offers leadership opportunities for students as well as chances for them to learn and practice self-direction. Several students have been hired as staff, and over the past few years the program has increased its efforts to share decision-making and control with students.

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